DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 120 179 SP 009 955

TITLE [City College Advisory Service and Workshop Center for Open Education.]
INSTITUTION City Univ. of New York, N.Y. City Coll. Workshop Center for Open Education.
PUB DATE [75]
NOTE 8p.

EDRS PRICE MF-$0.83 HC-$1.67 Plus Postage
DESCRIPTORS Open Education; *Professional Continuing Education; *Resource Centers; *Teacher Centers; Teacher Education; *Teacher Workshops
IDENTIFIERS *Distinguished Achievement Awards Entry

ABSTRACT

The City College Advisory Service and Workshop Center for Open Education, located on the main campus of City College in New York City, is a free facility for all participants in the school process--teachers, principals, supervisors, paraprofessionals, parents, and graduate/undergraduate students in the New York City area. It is sponsored by the City College School of Education and receives partial funding from City College, the National Institute of Education, and the Rockefeller Brothers Fund. Affiliated advisors in the schools are subsidized by the Learning Cooperative of the Board of Education of the City of New York and a number of community school boards. The Workshop Center offers curriculur activities in art, language, math, music, movement, science, and social studies; experiences with natural materials; and a shop, darkroom, kiln, kitchen, and reference library. Each month the Center publishes a schedule of workshops, discussions, and film showings led by Workshop Center staff, City College faculty, community persons, and experienced open classroom teachers. Four times a year the Center issues a journal featuring articles by teachers, staff, and other contributors to developments in open education. The Workshop Center was designed as a place in which to browse, to try something new or rethink something not so new, and to share ideas and practices in a relaxed and supportive setting. (Author)

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SUMMARY

The CITY COLLEGE ADVISORY SERVICE AND WORKSHOP CENTER FOR OPEN EDUCATION, located on the main campus of City College in New York City, is a free facility for all participants in the school process--teachers, principals, supervisors, paraprofessionals, parents, and graduate/undergraduate students in the New York City area. It is sponsored by the City College School of Education and receives partial funding from City College, the National Institute of Education and the Rockefeller Brothers Fund. Affiliated advisors in the schools are subsidized by the Learning Cooperative of the Board of Education of the City of New York and a number of Community School Boards.

Founder and director: Lillian Weber, professor of elementary education at City College.

The WORKSHOP CENTER offers curricular activities in art, language, math, music, movement, science, and social studies; experiences with natural materials; a shop, darkroom, kiln, kitchen, and reference library. Each month it publishes a schedule of workshops, discussions, and film showings (Monday-Thursday, 4-6; Saturdays, 10-1) led by Workshop Center staff, City College faculty, community persons, and experienced open classroom teachers. Four times a year it issues a journal, Notes from Workshop Center for Open Education, featuring articles by teachers, staff and other contributors to developments in open education. The WORKSHOP CENTER is, above all, a place in which to browse, to try something new or rethink something not so new, to share ideas and practice in a relaxed and supportive setting.

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CITY COLLEGE ADVISORY SERVICE AND WORKSHOP CENTER FOR OPEN EDUCATION

COMPREHENSIVE EXPLANATION

Setting

On any weekday afternoon, beginning at one o'clock, participants and visitors make their way through the once-grimy halls of City College's old neo-Gothic building, now lit up with brilliantly colored murals of children's work culled from neighboring Open Corridor classrooms, and into three cavernous rooms which originally housed the City College physics laboratories. There, transformed by paint, polish, and imagination, new spaces beckon and invite use. Emphasis on physical appearance is a deliberate aspect of the Workshop Center's total development and approach. By their time and effort invested in this stage, the staff, including the director and the office help, have succeeded in converting bleak, institutional surroundings into a warm, human, inviting facility-a feat that clearly transmits a message to all those who must start with the often sterile settings of our urban public schools. Rooms 3, 4, and 6 in Shepard Hall of City College now furnish a master lesson in how to change the seemingly unchangeable into the kind of environment that should form the physical base for open-classroom learning and teaching.

The three-room facility is the setting for workshops, lectures, demonstrations, large and small group meetings, film showings and videotaping, reference library, and dissemination. The Workshop Center publishing program's main feature is a quarterly journal, Notes from the Workshop Center for Open Education, a 48-page offset publication that deals with practical and theoretical problems in open education learning and teaching, classroom management, and curriculum materials. Each month, a new series of workshops and related activities is scheduled, led by consultants as well as staff members. Registration is limited to an attendance of 50 for each session, the number of places available. Registration, which is required in advance, is conducted by phone or in person. Workshop Center hours are set for 1 to 7:30 p.m., Monday through Thursday, and on Saturday from 10 a.m.

to 1 p.m. At any time, between 3:30 and 7 p.m., Monday through Thursday, any participant is welcomed to work on individual projects. Fridays are reserved for staff meetings and seminars, special consultations, and Advisory Service conferences. This year the Center has added a monthly Saturday workshop for Parents and Children.

Origins

The Workshop Center which opened in October 1972, is an offshoot of the City College Advisory Service that was created in 1970. Both programs have their origins in the first Open Corridor set up by Professor Lillian Weber in 1967. The Open Corridor was designed to explore the possibilities for reorganizing classrooms within massive urban public shools so that teachers could better support individual children's learning. As the Open Corridor Project grew, so did the need for on-site advisory support to teachers who were working to open their classrooms. By 1970, when the program had spread to some 15 schools, involving over 90 teachers and several thousand children, the City College Advisory Service to Open Corridors was organized (with the help of the Ford Foundation) to train advisors who would serve as guides, mentors, counselors and aides to Open Corridor teachers in their attempts to change. Continued growth led to the development of the Workshop Center, as a resource and facility outside the school, in which all participants in the school process--teachers, principals, supervisors, paraprofessionals, parents, and graduate/undergraduate students--would have free access to materials, experiences and consultations in support of their own efforts at changing the learning environments for children.

From 1972-1975, average annual attendance was about 5,000.

Organization, Management, Funding

From its inception through June 30, 1975, the Workshop Center was funded mainly by a Title III grant from the Office of Education channeled through its local sponsor, the Board of Education of the City of New York. During its second

year, the Workshop Center received money from the Rockefeller Brothers Fund for dissemination purposes, funding that continues to the present. In the current year, too, added funding comes from the National Institute of Education. Another source of support is City College which played an important role not only at the beginning of the Advisory Service, but in the emergence of the Center and in the initiation of its auxiliary services, such as the annual "Summer Institute." The College continues to provide the space for the Center, to release faculty for workshop activities, and to place student teachers in Open Corridor schools.

The Workshop Center draws support from an Advisory Council, composed of community people who have a role in discussion of the Center's future direction and development. Staff meetings are held weekly with Open Corridor advisors who work in public schools. At these Friday meetings any necessary adjustments in work plans are made and theoretical and practical aspects of open education are examined. From these meetings arise suggestions for Workshop Center programs. Teacher participants also are polled, formally as well as informally, for their suggestions for workshops. Parents join these meetings to ensure the widest participation. Meetings with experienced teachers and advisors are scheduled for late afternoon twice monthly.

Objectives

The Workshop Center aims to support the professional growth of school people who are making changes in the learning environments for children, by offering curricular activities in art, language, math, music, movement, science and social studies; experiences with natural materials; a shop, darkroom, kiln, kitchen, and reference library. The Center is above all, a place in which to browse, to try something new or rethink something not so new, to share ideas and practice in a relaxed and supportive setting. Through experiences and discussions at the Center, teachers will increase their understanding of (1) the rationale of open education, with a view to implementation that does not itself become a new orthodoxy but

remains open to change; (2) the relationship between language and experience, with emphasis on bilingualism in the classroom and on integrating language development with other curricular content; (3) the institutional conditions that facilitate change in the schools, through discussions, seminars, and consultations with advisors, administrators, principals and supervisors; (4) possible solutions of problems in classroom organization, planning, recording and assessment, based on observing children's uses and responses to materials, environment, and relationships; (5) the nature of curriculum, seeing curriculum in terms of broad bands of understanding rather than as a specific syllabus or as a specific subject.

Personnel

Present staff includes the director, 1 full-time workshop leader, 5 part-time workshop leaders, 1 part-time editor, 1 part-time assistant to the director, 1 secretary-clerk, 1 accountant, 3 student aides, 7 school advisors, 2 parent facilitators. Volunteers fill in the roles made vacant by the current cut in funds; they contribute services in all areas of the Center's program.

Budget for 1975-76: approximately $350,000, $215,000 of which is expended directly through the Center; the remainder is institutionalized support from City College, Board of Education, and local districts in the form of personnel, faculty released time and services.

Contribution to teacher education

The Workshop Center is concerned with the process and growth inherent in teachers' professional development. It creates a setting and offers activities that will encourage interaction of experienced and committed teachers with those who are beginning to move away from traditional approaches. Teachers who are changing need time and support for their maturing understanding and skills, and the Center provides services for beginners as well as for the experienced, with an eye to reinforcing continuity in development. Above all, the Center deals with the "workshop experience," in a special way: the familiar format of lecture/

demonstration, combined with active encounter with materials and ideas, is transformed into an experience of self-discovery in ways of learning. Such an approach, emphasizing the analogy between the teacher's own way of learning and that of the student, enlarges the teacher's appreciation of the way a child learns. A unique development has been the emergence of a core of experienced teachers, who function as advisors in turn.

The Center serves as a model emulated not only in teacher resource rooms, but also in the participants' own classrooms. Activities ranging from demonstrations to independent work on individual projects and from a single, one-time use to continuous and extended use give teachers the opportunity to reorder their store of content or to explore new possibilities in reading, math, science; to study questions relating to language development or discuss the issue of accountability, among others, and to discover in new companionship and shared experience the kind of support that relieves their anxiety about change.

The Workshop Center provides continuing education for practicing teachers (mainly elementary and junior high school levels); through its increasing institutionalization it services future teachers as well by offering its facilities to undergraduage classes at City College. Its success in furthering the development of the teacher's autonomy is based on its belief that improvement in the profession will come through teachers who take more and more responsibility for decisions on curriculum, instruction, and organization.

Evaluation methods and results

The program has been formally evaluated by two distinct groups: Educational Testing Service conducted interviews and observed activities in a formative evaluation; William Kinder for the Board of Education reviewed the Center as a Title III project in records and attendance figures; Patricia Bull Associates similarly studied the program and its extensions in the schools. What was evaluated was the change in teacher attitudes to the profession, reflected in participant

reaction at the Center and participant carryover into classroom work.

All three evaluations were unanimous in their positive appraisal of the Workshop Center, finding it a "resource without parallel" whose extensive use by professionals in particular was testimony to the need to support its continuance.

In addition, a number of scholars have studied the Workshop Center's and Advisory's work. Among them are: Joseph Grannis, Sylvia Ross, Adela Oliver, Nancy Rennhon, and Catherine Molony.